

STAT

ARTICLE APPEARED

ON PAGE E-20NEW YORK TIMES
11 OCTOBER 1981

Spying on Ourselves

The Reagan Administration wants the Congressional intelligence committees to bless, or at least tolerate, the Central Intelligence Agency's re-entry into the business of spying on Americans. The idea is just as intolerable now as it was last spring.

Then, the Administration flirted with a Presidential order to allow the infiltration of domestic political groups. If anything, the new draft seems more offensive than the discarded one. It would, with the Attorney General's approval, even allow the attempted internal manipulation of those groups.

The C.I.A. may yet be able to explain to its Congressional overseers how the proposal, hedged about with necessarily secret procedures and rules, can be administered in keeping with American liberties. More likely the Congressional briefings will reveal an old passion in the guise of a new and foolhardy order that Congress should warn President Reagan against signing. Indeed, even if Congress wanted to legitimize this spying scheme, it probably would have to repeal a critical section of the very law that created the C.I.A.

The National Security Act of 1947 made clear that the United States wanted an intelligence apparatus strong enough to protect against foreign adversaries — but not one that could easily be turned inward. "The agency shall have no police, subpoena, law enforcement powers, or internal security functions," Congress decreed then. It knew that an agency with the power to probe and disrupt activities

of people who are not reasonably suspected of crimes like espionage is a political police force.

Over the years, national emergencies, domestic strife, security scares and power-seeking Presidents chipped away at the protections. The C.I.A. went so far that in 1967 it launched Operation Chaos, an effort to connect domestic dissenters with foreign espionage; the agency collected information on hundreds of thousands of Americans.

Just six years ago, Ronald Reagan joined other members of the Rockefeller Commission to deplore Chaos and the C.I.A.'s "deviation in the United States from its assigned mission." They called on future Presidents to renew the pledge to keep the C.I.A. out of internal security work.

Presidents Ford and Carter made a strong start toward creating reasonable legal restraints without sacrificing intelligence gathering. Their guidelines assured that Americans needn't fear surveillance unless Government had cause to believe they were acting on behalf of a foreign power.

This was self-regulation at its best. Now the Reagan security forces act as though those careful rules are nothing but stupid red tape. Cut it, they say. Unleash the C.I.A. In place of strict rules, they promise to obey the law. But it is only with rules that such a promise can be trusted. Unless Congress dissuades the President, he may sign the rules away — and open the road back toward Chaos.